

Romans Trailhead

Discover God's Word. Start walking.

Invitation to Discovery

Romans has been read, studied, debated, and taught for centuries. But before it was any of those things, it was a letter - a letter without chapter numbers or verse numbers.

As you read, don't worry about understanding everything at once. Pay attention to the words and ideas Paul returns to. Notice the questions he asks. Watch how he reaches back into Scripture. Listen for what he says about God, humanity, Jesus Christ, faith, mercy, and the people God is bringing together.

You don't need to have Romans figured out before you begin.

Start walking. Pay attention. Let Scripture show you the terrain.

Romans at a Glance

Author: God

Dictated by: Paul

Written down by: Tertius (Romans 16:22)

Written to: Believers in Rome

Approximate Date: AD 56-58

Written from: Likely Corinth, near the end of Paul's third missionary journey

Type of Writing: Letter

Where It Fits: Romans comes after the four Gospel accounts and Acts in our New Testament. Paul wrote it to believers in Rome before he had visited them.

People to Notice: Paul, Jesus Christ, Abraham, Adam, Israel, Jews and Gentiles - and the many believers Paul names near the end of the letter.

Places to Notice: Rome, Jerusalem, Spain, and the regions where Paul had already proclaimed the gospel.

Mini-Mellow - Did You Know?

Paul wasn't the one holding the pen when Romans was written.

Near the end of the letter, someone else suddenly introduces himself:

"I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord." - Romans 16:22

Paul dictated the letter, but **Tertius wrote it down.**

When you reach Romans 16, watch for him. He's easy to miss!

Discover Romans

Romans covers a lot of ground. You don't need to understand everything the first time through.

As you read, watch for ideas, words, people, and questions that appear again and again. Think of these as **landmarks** along the trail. They won't tell you what to think or connect every dot for you - but they can help you recognize when you've been somewhere before.

Here are seven landmarks to watch for as you explore Romans.

1. The Gospel & the Righteousness of God

Paul begins Romans by talking about the **gospel**, and he keeps returning to it.

As you read, watch for words such as **gospel, righteousness, righteous, faith, believe, salvation, and Jesus Christ**.

Places to Explore: Romans 1:1-17; 3:21-31; 10:1-17; 16:25-27

Notice what Paul says the gospel is **about**, what God reveals through it, and who it is **for**.

Trail Question:

What do you learn about God as Paul explains the gospel?

2. Sin, Wrath & Judgment

Romans doesn't look away from what is wrong with humanity.

Watch for words such as **sin, wrath, judgment, condemn, death, evil, and ungodliness**. Pay attention to whom Paul is talking about - and notice when his focus shifts from **they** to **you** to **all**.

Places to Explore: Romans 1:18-32; 2:1-16; 3:9-23; 5:12-21; 6:20-23

Trail Question:

What does Romans reveal about humanity - and what does it reveal about God?

3. Faith, Works & the Law

Paul returns again and again to **faith, works, and the law** - and often places them side by side.

Watch for words such as **faith, believe, works, law, commandment, promise, righteousness, grace, justify / justified, and counted / credited**. Pay attention to the questions Paul asks and the examples he uses, especially when **Abraham** enters the conversation.

Places to Explore: Romans 2:12-29; 3:19-31; 4:1-25; 7:1-25; 9:30-10:13

Trail Question:

As Paul talks about faith, works, and the law, what distinctions - and connections - do you notice?

4. Death, Life & Union with Christ

Throughout Romans, **death and life** appear again and again. As Paul develops these ideas, watch closely for the ways he connects them with **Christ**.

Watch for words and phrases such as **death, died, life, live, buried, raised, united, baptized, "old self," "newness of life," slavery, free, "with Christ," "with Him," and "in Christ."**

Places to Explore: Romans 5:12-21; 6:1-23; 7:1-6; 8:1-17

Trail Question:

What changes as Paul moves from death to life - and what does being **with** or **in Christ** have to do with it?

5. The Spirit & New Life

As Romans moves forward, **the Spirit becomes increasingly prominent in Paul's words**. Pay attention when He appears and what Paul says about Him.

Watch for words and phrases such as **Spirit, flesh, life, body, mind, dwell, led, adoption, groaning, and hope**. Notice who is acting, who is leading, and what the Spirit is doing.

Places to Explore: Romans 5:1-5; 7:4-6; 8:1-30; 12:1-21; 15:13-19

Trail Question:

What do you discover about the Spirit - and what changes when life is lived by the Spirit?

6. Jew and Gentile - Promise, Remnant & Mercy

From the beginning of Romans, Paul speaks about **Jews and Gentiles**. As the letter unfolds, those threads become increasingly important - and Paul repeatedly reaches back into Scripture.

Watch for words and images such as **Jew, Gentile, Israel, promise, Abraham, descendants, remnant, mercy, all**, and the **olive tree and its branches**. Pay attention to whom Paul is speaking about, the questions he asks, and the Scriptures he uses.

Places to Explore: Romans 1:16; 3:1-9, 27-31; 4:9-17; 9:1-11:36; 15:7-13

Trail Question:

What do you discover about God as Paul traces these promises?

7. Welcome to the Family

As Romans moves toward its close, Paul's attention increasingly turns toward **life together** - real people learning how to live, serve, love, and worship alongside one another.

Watch for words and phrases such as **one another, love, serve, honor, body, weak, strong, neighbor, welcome, and peace**. Pay attention to Paul's instructions - and especially to how people are told to treat one another when they do not agree.

Places to Explore: Romans 12:1-21; 13:8-14; 14:1-23; 15:1-13; 16:1-23

Trail Question:

What does life together begin to look like as Romans moves from teaching to people, relationships, and everyday choices?

Timeline

Romans was written at a particular moment in the story you have been reading throughout Scripture. Here are a few landmarks that can help you see where the letter fits.

Creation & Fall

God creates the world and humanity. Sin enters the story, and death follows.

Genesis 1-3



Abraham

God makes promises to Abraham and his descendants.

Genesis 12; 15; 17



Israel

Abraham's descendants become a people, receive God's law, live in the land, experience exile and return, and wait for what God has promised.



Jesus Christ

Jesus comes, dies, is raised from the dead, and sends His followers to make disciples among the nations.



The Gospel Spreads

In Acts, the good news about Jesus moves outward from Jerusalem as Jews and Gentiles believe.



Paul Proclaims the Gospel

Paul travels through cities and regions across the Roman world proclaiming Jesus Christ.



Romans - About AD 56-58

Paul writes to believers in Rome before he has visited them.



Paul Hopes to Visit Rome

Near the end of the letter, Paul tells the Romans about his plans to travel to Jerusalem and his hope to visit them on his way to Spain.

Romans 15:22-29



The Story Continues -> Acts

Reflection Questions

Before you begin Romans, take a moment to consider:

- What do you already think the **gospel** is?
- When you encounter something in Romans that challenges what you already believe or understand, how will you respond?
- What are you hoping to discover about **God - and about yourself - as you read?**
- Are there words, ideas, or passages in Romans that you have heard before but have never explored in their larger context?
- What questions are you bringing with you as you begin?

Watch for where Romans addresses the questions you're carrying - and where it doesn't.

You don't need to answer everything now. Keep these questions nearby as you read. Your answers - and perhaps even your questions - may change along the way.

Prayer Before Reading

Before you open Romans, take a moment to pray.

Ask God to help you:

- **See what is actually in the text**, not simply what you expect to find.
- **Understand what He has revealed** about Himself, about humanity, and about Jesus Christ.
- **Notice words, questions, connections, and patterns** you might otherwise pass by.
- **Remain humble when the text challenges your understanding.**
- **Respond faithfully** to what you discover.

You don't need an elaborate prayer. Simply ask God to help you listen carefully to His Word and to know Him more deeply through what He has revealed.

Now Open Your Bible

You've gotten your bearings. You've seen some of the landmarks ahead. Now it's time to explore Romans for yourself.

Read slowly. Pay attention. Follow the questions, words, people, and ideas that catch your attention. When something seems familiar, stop and look again. When something is difficult, don't be afraid to stay with it.

You don't need to discover everything on your first walk through Romans.

Open your Bible.

Start walking.